Two imperatives have influenced the approach to the development of Standards and Professional Practice at the Victorian Institute of Teaching: fulfilling its legislative responsibility for establishing and maintaining standards of professional practice for entry to and continuing membership of the profession and the responsibility to do so inclusively on behalf of the teachers whose Institute it is, and for whom the processes must provide benefit. At the heart of its work the Institute has an abiding commitment to working directly with teachers for the benefit of the profession and a vision of a strong collegiate culture of professional learning based on an agreed and coherent set of professional standards. And it is the combination of these imperatives that is providing the intrinsic motivation for teachers in Victoria to engage with and claim ownership of the standards.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching, in addition to its registration function, has responsibility for the development of standards of professional practice for entry to and continuing membership of the teaching profession, and a Professional Learning Framework to support the professional development of all teachers in Victoria. The Institute’s work is underpinned by the belief that statements of professional standards can provide teachers with a powerful sense of their own worth, a clear articulation of their professional knowledge and skill, and assist them to identify their own professional learning needs. Standards can make explicit the intuitive understandings and knowledge that characterise good teaching practice and enable the principles of good practice to be widely shared within the profession. (MACVIT, 2001)

Standards of professional practice should articulate what the profession values and understands to be its specialised knowledge and practice, and provide a guide to what the profession expects its members to know and be able to do. They define and promote the professional nature of teachers’ work and the uniqueness of this profession. These are not new ideas, and have been articulated and embraced in discussion papers and various commentaries about professional standards for teachers at the national level since the discussion of status and quality within the profession began.

The profession in Victoria has strongly endorsed the view of the Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teachers, that: professional standards are the province of the teaching profession itself, and should be established and upheld by the profession’. (A Class Act, (1998). The
Institute Council is clear in its view that professional standards must be developed with teachers and owned by the profession.

The essentiality of broad professional engagement in the process of developing standards of professional practice has been emphasised by all constituencies in the standards debate in Australia. In the national discussions auspiced by the Australian College of Education (ACE), the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) and the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) around the development of standards of professional practice an imperative was the engagement of teachers in the process.

Any commitment (to the development of Standards of Professional Practice) that did not involve proper consultation would lack credibility... provide little more than rhetoric and would have no perceptive impact on practice (Brock 2000:9).

This is a sentiment echoed continuously amongst teachers and key organisations in Victoria, and nationally where teachers and other educators are participating in the discussion of a national framework of standards for the teaching profession. It is the first principle in the national statement, Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism: Towards a Nationally Agreed Framework and a given.

Even so, Ken Boston’s challenge on this issue for delegates to the National Meeting of Professional Educators in April 2002, still resonates through the debate.

“Who speaks for the profession? Many would claim to do so - but few speak with authority across all the layers of practical, intellectual, sectoral, social and collegial experiences of teachers.” Boston 2002

There is a strong tradition of groups, key stakeholders and other professional organisations to claim to be the profession, to speak on behalf of teachers everywhere, when their sphere of influence and capacity to speak for teachers is relatively narrow and sectional. Employers and parent bodies too claim legitimacy in the discussion, sometimes speaking on behalf of teachers with whom they are associated and at other times on behalf of those they represent. There is a cacophony of voices claiming the same legitimacy to speak on behalf of the profession.

It is more than likely that the new professional bodies, such as the Victorian Institute of Teaching, and eventually the NSW Institute of Teachers and the Western Australian College of Teachers, will provide for the first time, the determined and focussed voice teachers have long demanded. With their broad functions and reach into the profession, through their registration function, they have a genuine capacity to understand and to speak about teaching across sectoral boundaries, and across the varied experiences of teachers in those states.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching, for example, has both the legislative responsibility for establishing and maintaining standards of professional practice for entry to and continuing membership of the profession and the responsibility to do so inclusively and wisely and for the benefit of teachers who have paid their registration fees, and from which the process is funded.
It is in this context that the Institute has taken up the challenge of engaging teachers directly in the development of standards that will be used to describe their professional practice and the ways in which those standards will be used. To be owned by teachers, standards must be grounded in the realities of teachers’ work, wherever and whatever that work is, mindful of the key issues in each of those contexts. The Institute is fully aware that it is at this diverse field level – in staff rooms and classrooms - where small and large accumulations of knowledge, values and skills are still often clutched tightly, or held close to the chest, that ‘ownership’ of quality initiatives stands or falls. (Boston 2002). The Institute’s challenge is to connect with the diversity and those deep places within the profession where knowledge, value and skills reside, to build ownership of the standards for which it is now responsible.

The Standards and Professional Learning Project, involving some 590 teachers and principals directly, with the expressed intention of connecting with many thousands more in a broader consultation program, and thousands more again over the next five years, is testing the capacity of a professional body to deliver the real engagement with teachers, that educators across the nation see as essential.

One advantage the Institute has is the capacity to interact with the significant number of teachers who access the Institute’s registration function but who also have an extraordinary appetite for support and professional learning. Beginning teachers in Victoria are providing the impetus and the mechanism for engaging with the profession to develop the broad framework for standards for professional practice and the first level within it, Standards for Full Registration.

It is expected that 15,000 new teachers will join the profession and take up positions in Victorian schools over the next five years. This generational change in the profession provides an opportunity and an inescapable need for re-building collegiate practice, for focusing on a deeper professional learning and, in doing so, for reshaping the profession. It is an appropriate time to conceptualise a change in the culture of teaching, to build a vision of a collegiate culture of professional learning based on an agreed and coherent set of professional standards.

It is the aim of the Institute that every graduate teacher in Victorian schools has at least a year long mentored induction program which focuses on diagnosis and improvement, mutual respect and a presumption of success in developing sound professional practice described in Standards for Full Registration. The Standards and Professional Learning Project, involving 220 graduate teachers and the mentors working with them, has provided a vibrant and ongoing discussion about what it means to be a teacher and what the essential practices for effective teaching are.

The Draft Standards for Full Registration, which have emerged from the project, provide a coherent framework for considering the breadth and depth of professional practice and ensure teachers develop reflective practice which encompasses all the complexities of teaching. They also ensure that a teacher’s professional learning is broadly based around growth in the three essential domains of Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement.
The standards themselves are generic, seeking to describe what is common to all teachers and serve as the foundation for further development of standards beyond registration. They are different from standards used previously in Victorian Schools.

Based very closely on the frameworks devised by English and Literacy teachers through the STELLA (Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy) project, and Mathematics and Science teachers in the establishment of subject-specific standards, the Institute's standards offer a more coherent framework based in the experiences, knowledge and values of teachers. They do not have the overt overlay of employers' managerial imperatives. The standards focus on what is required for effective professional practice and provide scope for something other than understanding and implementing employer initiatives and being effective teachers in a specific employment context. There is an emerging sense of professional empowerment and autonomy inherent in the framework and the extended standards statement.

The narrow assessment-focused experience of Standards for Professional Practice that Victorian teachers, and particularly those in government schools, have had to date, colour the debate in Victoria. A number of commentators on that experience are sceptical and have been, at times, both fearful and hostile to the development of the standards function of the Institute. Will the Institute’s Standards for Full Registration oversimplify the complexity of teaching as Blackmore and Brennan (2002) have suggested, or straight-jacket teachers and stifle their individuality as a small number of teachers feared in the recent consultation?

While the Institute believes standards will have neither of these outcomes, this has been a focus of the discussion the profession has had in Victoria in July and August. The extended statement contains some 32 broad elements of professional practice seen by the teachers in the project to be essential for or exemplars of effective practice within the profession. The intention has been to capture the complexity of teaching without limiting or prescribing the practice of it. Careful use of language to ensure a range of practice is possible within a given area is a feature of the standards descriptions. Too much prescription will clearly stifle innovation, limit diversity and negate intuition as a source of quality in teaching. The engagement of the profession in the development of the standards statement to this point, and a broad consultation process has ensured that these issues are on the table and the profession itself is determining the direction the framework takes in this regard.

A further question is whether the framework will allow us to embrace the future and accommodate growth and development in teaching knowledge and practice, or whether such a framework will lock the profession into a static version of teaching reality somewhere in the late 20th Century. Current research, endorsed in the professional experience of teachers involved in the project, suggests that teaching standards need to recognise the importance of different forms of knowledge (general pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge), and to provide for the further and ongoing development of teachers' knowledge and skills. (Masters, 2001).

The Standards for Full Registration acknowledge as equal components of professional knowledge, content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge. The framework
also recognises contextual knowledge of students as learners and the communities in which they live as an essential professional knowledge. As each of these knowledge bases change over time and with further research and development, the framework will accommodate both current and emerging pedagogy and impacts of social and technological change. The framework is dynamic, able to be reviewed and refined as professional knowledge and practice change and develop. Review of the framework and the substance of the Standards for Full Registration is a planned feature of the Institute’s work.

Changes and development in professional knowledge and practice emerge from research and from the innovative practice of teachers themselves. The Institute is keen to promote more effective ways for teachers to develop deeper understanding of teaching and learning and more sophisticated practice. Models of professional development which are integrated and ongoing rather than episodic, and which incorporate the analysis and discussion of student work, emerging as highly effective from research conducted by ACER, (Masters, 2002), are integral to the processes for full registration being trialled by the Institute. This approach provides for ongoing development of the profession in a collegiate culture of professional learning with agreed professional standards at the centre.

Time will tell, of course, how these standards are used and how well they are accepted by teachers. The clarity, validity and credibility of the framework has been tested by teachers in the project and across Victoria in the last two months. Our project participants have demonstrated the powerful learning that occurs through focussed professional conversation and a reciprocation and a genuine transfer of knowledge in a mentoring partnership. The reflective practices which are developing in these partnerships, the concentration on elements of essential practice and the re-assessing and refining of experienced teachers’ practice as well as growth in beginning teachers’ practice, are providing a clear base for powerful articulation of what teachers know and do and why they do it that way.

The broad consultation process with teachers across Victoria has provided a uniform and overwhelmingly positive response from teachers across the sectors and across the state. There has been consistently high acceptance of the standards framework’s capacity to establish reasonable expectations for teachers’ professional practice, to provide an appropriate foundation for the development of further standards, and to capture the complexity and diversity of teachers’ work well.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching is determined that the standards developed to define what is to be a member of this profession can claim a professional space outside of those forces in education that distract teachers from being highly effective practitioners and sharing good practice. Teachers themselves have certainly been eager to move into that space, with some 6500 teachers participating directly in the consultation process and embracing the standards framework as an appropriate set of expectations for the profession. The Institute is committed to continuing its work with teachers to build a powerfully knowledgeable and articulate group of teachers who own and continue to develop their professionalism.
We are hopeful, that in encouraging teachers to focus on what is at the core of effective teaching, on promoting collegiate conversation and a culture of shared and reflective practice, where professional learning is ongoing and builds deeper understanding of current and emerging professional knowledge and practice, that teachers will re-establish their sense of professional autonomy. It may well be that in an environment of increased professional dialogue, in the exchange of ideas about the quality of professional practice, that the broader social and cultural questions about education can again begin to be addressed.

The importance of developing “professionally and publicly coherent, valid and credible standards of professional practice ‘owned’ by the profession and acknowledged by the wider society” (A National Discussion Paper on Professional Teaching Standards) has been at the forefront of current national discussions around teacher quality and professionalism in Australia.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching is presently facing this challenge in its development of Professional Standards for Full Registration. These standards are the first phase of the Institute’s requirement to “develop, establish and maintain standards of professional practice for entry into the teaching profession and for continuing membership of the profession.” (Victorian Institute of Teaching Act 2001), and will support teachers as they enter the profession as well as providing a key process of the Institute’s registration function.

Registration of teachers by the Victorian Institute of Teaching requires three criteria to be met: appropriate teaching qualifications, fitness to teach and competence in professional practice. From 2003 all teachers entering the profession in Victoria will be issued with provisional registration for an initial period of twelve months, in which they will have time to show evidence that their professional practice meets the standards expected by the profession. Obviously, this will require all graduate teachers to be provisionally registered and to undertake a process for gaining full registration. The challenge is to provide a process that is supportive and formative for teachers in their beginning years, while at the same time fulfilling the regulatory requirements of the Institute to ensure that these teachers can demonstrate an acceptable standard of professional practice.

Teaching has been one of the few professions where graduates have been thrown into complex and demanding work with support that has been inconsistent across the systems and, in some cases, non existent. By developing standards of professional practice the Institute will be able to provide direction for induction and mentoring programs, for teachers joining the profession, that is consistent across all sectors. These standards would also articulate the professional learning that should be the focus of that induction year and make explicit what it means to be a teacher and a member of the profession.
By offering a supported beginning year, the Institute aims to curb the high rate of attrition for teachers with less than five years of experience that is presently occurring in Victoria and to nurture the practice of the newest members of the profession.

Of course, the test of the clarity, validity and credibility of any standards is their acceptance and use by teachers. To this end, the Institute has recruited over five hundred and ninety experienced and beginning teachers into the Standards and Professional Learning Project (SPLP). Within this research and development project these teachers are refining the Standards of Professional Practice for Full Registration and investigating the processes that all provisionally registered teachers will undertake to meet these standards in 2004.

By using standards as the basis to build a better way of joining the profession, the Institute “will provide a sharper focus to national leadership as Victorian teachers put the theory into practice.” (Emmett and Paull 2003: 10)

An interim standards framework has been developed for use in the project and this has been done in consultation with teachers, drawing on the best of national and international standards statements and frameworks and, more recently, the work of the Mathematics, Science, English and Literacy teachers in Australia in developing subject specific standards.

These interim standards of professional practice articulate what teachers’ value and understand to be their specialised knowledge and practice and provide a guide to what the profession expects its members to know and be able to do.

The Institute Council adopted the interim standards in October 2002 for use in the project. The members of the Council were confident that they provide a coherent starting framework for describing teachers’ work and are able to capture the complexity of that work. While our focus at this time has been on the professional practice necessary to move from provisional registration to full registration, a more extensive and complete standards framework will be developed over a five year period, using the Standards for Full Registration as their basis.

In defining a framework of professional standards for Victorian teachers, five principles have been embraced. How well these principles stand up to the scrutiny of the profession, and ultimately how good the standards are in articulating what it is a beginning teacher should know and be able to do, is being put to the test in the project.

The first principle is that the standards must be generic, that is, they must embrace all teachers at all stages of their professional lives. In supporting generic standards Boston argues, “The appropriate distinction between beginning and advanced practice was in the degree of sophistication that teachers exhibit in the application of knowledge rather than the kind of knowledge needed.” (Boston 1999: 10)

Thus, the standards developed in the first instance apply to provisionally registered teachers seeking full registration but could reasonably apply to any teacher with any level of experience. This standards framework will, in future years, also apply to entry
into the profession and continuing membership of the profession. So the professional standards exist within the continuum of teaching as a career and not just in relation to a moment in a teacher’s professional life.

The Institute is quite unique in that it has responsibility for teachers across all sectors in Victoria and this is another reason why the standards need to be generic.

A strength of the project is that, as part of its design, it has sought to accommodate the diversity within the profession in the selection of participants. The design of the project included teachers from primary, secondary and special development schools in the government, Catholic and independent sectors. The proportion of these schools in the project mirrors those in the wider profession and the schools are drawn from regional and metropolitan areas. Within the project there are also single-sex boys and girls schools, P-10 and P-12 schools and schools that embrace the full range of socio-economic situations apparent in Melbourne and regional Victoria. Teachers in the project teach across a variety of age groups and subject areas.

The relevance of the standards is challenged in the diversity of these teaching contexts. To date, the response from the project participants has been encouraging. There is a general acceptance that the standards do capture the essential elements of good teaching and participants are prepared to use them as a measure of their own practice. The real challenge lies in the demonstration of the standards and the collection of evidence required to meet them.

Rod Chadbourne writes about the third wave of professional standards as being multi-layered and professionally defined (72) and this is where we envisage these standards fitting. They are not mutually exclusive of subject-specific standards; in fact they have drawn heavily on these in their development, but they serve to unify the profession by offering a common understanding of what is at the core of teaching and learning. This is the second principle underpinning the standards; that they provide a common language and understanding to promote a collegial community of support and debate. As Danielson states,

“It is through serious, professional conversations about the components comprising the framework that the components are validated for any particular setting.” (Danielson 1996: 6)

The standards also offer “comparability and coherence across the profession” (Chadbourne 2000: 73) which is essential if they are to have meaning within the broad range of teaching contexts outlined previously.

The benefits of an induction year flow on to the mentors as much as the teachers being mentored through the ability of the standards to open up common understandings and foster the collegial conversations that teachers must have if they are to work together effectively. This has been borne out in a response to the standards, of one of the mentors in the project:

“It has been great to be able to stand back and see the ‘big picture’ for the profession as a whole and also to be involved in the minutiae of what standards mean for individuals. I have gained a great deal from working with my graduate teacher. It has meant that I have
needed to be more reflective and I have gained a great deal from our collaborative
relationship. It has helped my own professional practice.”
(SPLP mentor)

It is apparent that this experienced teacher is using the standards, not only as a means
to communicate with her mentoring partner, but also as a way of reflecting upon her
own professional practice. The collegial conversation that is occurring shows that the
standards have relevance as a means of articulating the essential elements of teaching
regardless of experience. They also underline the importance of professional reflection
at all points in a teacher’s career. As Feiman-Nemser puts it; “By taking the professional
development of mentor teachers seriously, induction programs increase experienced teachers
capacity for critical conversation and joint work, key elements in the creation of authentic
professional learning communities.” (29)

The success of the standards in providing a common language for teachers leads into
the third principle embedded in them. The standards must be grounded in the realities
of teaching. They must validate and accommodate the professional and practical
knowledge of teachers. As Boston puts it;
“Teachers themselves must clarify what their profession stands for and what it is to stand for
in the future.” (Boston 1997: 8)

The consultation with project participants has been dynamic and, sometimes,
confronting. They have been asked to check all processes and requirements to meet the
standards for full registration against their own experiences. Feedback on practicality
and credibility has resulted in extensive and, often rapid, revision and reworking of
materials for the induction and mentoring process.
Whilst initially very sceptical that their suggestions would really be incorporated in the
end product, the realisation that their view is valid and important to us has empowered
many of the project participants. This is evidence of the gradual emergence of
‘ownership’ of the standards and processes to meet them.

Some of the most lively and engaging debates have occurred in our Workshops when
we asked participants to consider revisions to the standards. General acceptance of the
standards was taken as given and the debate raged around the nuances of certain
words, the relevance of some aspects of the core elements and the meanings implied
by design and structure of the standards. In many instances, teachers referred to their
own teaching practice and context to comment upon the standards.

To hear debate of this calibre encourages us to believe that these standards can be
relevant to all teachers and provide the identification of what it means to be a good
teacher that we are seeking.

Having consulted on the standards with the project participants over an extended
period of time, the draft standards of professional practice for full registration were
offered for consultation to the whole profession. In all, over six thousand teachers
responded, as individuals or part of a group, to the standards document and, as with
the project participants, the response has been very favourable.
As is indicated in Table 1, below, there has been consistently high acceptance of the standards framework against seven key objectives. Teachers have indicated high levels of approval that the standards establish reasonable expectations for teachers’ professional practice (77%), provide an appropriate foundation for the development of further standards (73%), and capture the complexity and diversity of teachers’ work well (73%). Less than 10% of those responding thought that the standards framework could not deliver on the objectives established, or could do so only slightly.

Table 1: Consultation Data: Key Objectives All Responses

Teachers have been more questioning of the framework’s capacity to provide a blueprint for teachers’ professional learning (62%) and to define and promote teachers’ specialised skill and knowledge (67%). This is not particularly surprising given Victorian teachers’ experience of standards to date. Qualitative data from the responses have highlighted a prevailing and somewhat negative experience of the use of standards as an assessment and performance management tool. A clear challenge for the Institute is to ensure that the developmental and formative purpose of the standards for Full Registration is advanced quickly and with obvious benefits to teachers in their earliest years of practice. Even so an acceptance rate of 62% is a very positive outcome.

Forums were held seventeen locations across the state during the consultation period to offer teachers the opportunity to meet and discuss the draft standards. The response to these forum events was very good and much constructive discussion occurred at these meetings. The qualitative data gather from these meetings has been particularly useful in reshaping and refining the detail within the standards statement. Having teachers talk about what it is a teacher should know and be able to do cuts to the very core of quality teaching and learning and this has begun to occur within the profession in Victoria.

The consultation process undertaken by the Institute has shown that seventy per cent of respondents felt that the standards accurately described the work of a teacher and there was a similar acceptance that the standards captured the complexity of teaching. While there has been revision of the statement of principle that underpins the standards as a
vision statement, and numerous suggestions for minor changes to the exemplars, the standards themselves have been clearly endorsed by the teaching profession in Victoria.

Acceptance of the standards is only the first stage but without this teachers will be reluctant to incorporate the language and meaning of the standards into their own practice. The Institute is now negotiating with sectoral employers to ensure that these standards and process for their use as a developmental tool are supported within existing structures. This will ensure that any teacher new to the profession in Victoria has a clear idea of the attributes of good teaching and appropriate support to develop their own professional practice with this in mind.

As a fourth principle the standards must allow for professional growth and help define professional learning for teachers and this is a theme that has been emerging through the previous principles. The portfolio evidence that provisionally registered teachers will collect to meet the Standards for Full Registration must offer them an insight into their own practice that will make explicit the professional learning that they need to pursue to become an even better teacher.

In devising a series of portfolio tasks for provisionally registered teachers the project team has attempted to do much more than simply offer a checklist. The concerns Delandshere and Arens have expressed that portfolios consist “for the most part... of more or less organized collections of work and reflections to be read and evaluated once in a summative manner.” (58) have been addressed in a variety of ways that enable the portfolio to contribute to the development of a teaching culture that is reflective and collaborative.

Moreover, the portfolio is an attempt to engage new teachers in those professional activities that promote effective teaching such as self-reflection and evaluation, collaboration on teaching tasks and the participation in professional discussion and debate. These are aspects of teaching that Uhlenbeck, Verloop and Beijaard (249) have identified as essential to professional development and are central to the domain of professional engagement in the standards for full registration.

This underlines the importance of a mentor to the whole process of developing and nurturing young teachers. A strong professional relationship between teachers provides opportunities for collaboration and professional conversations to occur in a supportive environment that allows a new teacher to develop confidence to express ideas.

Provisionally registered teachers in the project are documenting two activities undertaken as part of a sequence of learning that is presented to a class. The wider context of the activities in terms of the concept, skill or idea to be taught is considered in planning and, by focussing on the work of two students in the class, the teacher has the opportunity to gain insights that will refine their professional practice and reflect on the effectiveness of their work in improving learning outcomes.

The sequence of learning should be part of the teacher’s normal work and should not be additional or developed outside the teacher’s usual work program as only by applying them to real situations can the standards really mean anything to a teacher.
Provisionally registered teachers are also opening up their practice to scrutiny, undertaking at least three investigations of classroom practice. This may involve team teaching, observing another teacher’s classroom practice or inviting a ‘critical friend’ (usually the mentor) to observe their practice. This is not an inspectorial model but one that allows the provisionally registered teacher to control the process and define the learning they want to achieve. An essential aspect of this is a pre and post observation meeting where the colleagues can discuss their focus and share a professional conversation.

When classroom observation occurs sensitively and with the guidance and support of trusted mentors and colleagues, they can be very powerful and positive learning experiences for both beginning teachers and their mentors. This is especially so “if they include peer evaluation, flexible criteria and professional development or recognition as components in the process.” (Aiex, 1993)

What is important in this project is that there is reciprocation and a genuine transfer of knowledge between the teachers participating. This is not a deficit model but one that recognises the wealth of knowledge, life experience and enthusiasm that first year teachers bring to their professional communities. This has been incredibly powerful for our mentors but also confronting and challenging as they consider their own practice in light of the standards.

“It’s so wonderful to be around someone who is so full of enthusiasm and motivation. She encourages me to ‘put my money where my mouth is’ and demonstrate good teaching practice and professionalism! I’ve spent many hours reviewing and reflecting on my own experiences and refining my approach.”

(SPLP mentor)

The benefit of a mentor who can guide and support a teacher in their first year has also been affirmed in the project. The mutual respect that has been developed between these teachers is apparent in comments made by the provisionally registered teachers. “We support each other and often my mentor will request my opinion on issues. It is less a one way student/teacher relationship but more of a peer support.”

(SPLP provisionally registered teacher)

In the end, the standards and processes developed in the project will rise or fall on their ability to develop teachers who understand good practice and reflect frequently and critically on their own professional practice. While this project is ostensibly about full registration, the assessment of provisionally registered teachers is predicated on success and the majority of teachers will easily meet or, in many cases, exceed the standards for full registration. Unless the induction processes developed to guide teachers through their first year are formative and supportive and lead to the establishment of professional learning as an integral part of a teacher’s life, provisional registration will have little meaning and will become just another pointless administrative hurdle for teachers to leap.

There is some hope that this will not be the case when considering this comment from one of our provisionally registered teachers:
“I believe the most important attribute of any teacher is the belief in life long learning. Whether you have been teaching for one term or ten years we all have learning ahead of us. Reminder of this has helped me continue on my journey as a beginning teacher.”

(SPLP provisionally registered teacher)

Finally, the fifth principal embedded in the standards is that they must be dynamic and grow with the profession. To have credibility with teachers in Victoria, they must also have intellectual credibility and keep reflecting on, and contributing to the discussion of the broader national and international understandings of what it is to be a teacher.

For teachers to be involved in what Chadbourne calls “standard-making rather than standard-taking” (73) means that the standards become the benchmark of professionalism and are deeply embedded in the practice and professional growth of all teachers. The Victorian Institute of Teaching represents all teachers in Victoria and standards that are developed to define what it is to be a member of this profession must rise above those forces in education that distract from being good teachers and sharing good teaching practice.

What we want to build is a powerfully intelligent group of teachers who can articulate, own and develop their new profession. In Hargreave’s words this would “give teachers the privilege and responsibility of establishing their own collective professionalism, so they are the vanguard, rather than the victims, of educational reform.” (Hargreaves 1997:10)

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